UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1998/2/Add.1
26 June 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Sixteenth session
27-31 July 1998
Item 5 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES - EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

Note by the secretariat

Information received from intergovernmental organizations and indigenous peoples

1. In resolution 1982/34 of 7 May 1982, the Economic and Social Council authorized the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to establish annually a working group on indigenous populations to review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations, together with information requested annually by the Secretary-General, and to give special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations.

2. The Sub-Commission, in its resolution 1997/14 of 22 August 1997, requested the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the Working Group to intergovernmental, indigenous and non-governmental organizations and to invite them to provide information, in particular in matters relating to indigenous peoples: education and language. The Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1998/13 of 9 April 1998, urged the Working Group to continue its comprehensive review of developments and welcomed the proposal to highlight the question of indigenous education and language. The present document contains information in relation to item 5 of the provisional agenda.

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION:
INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION

[Original: ENGLISH]
[20 May 1998]

Adult education and indigenous peoples

1. In the discussion of education and language issues, the place of education for young and mature adults who belong to indigenous groups has been largely missing. Yet in many respects this is also a group that has the greatest disadvantage with regard to formal schooling, with high drop-out rates at primary level, lack of local secondary and tertiary level educational facilities in indigenous regions, and high levels of migration in many countries, in search of economic improvement. Monolingualism and/or partial bilingualism also contributes to specific needs for adult education for this sector of the population, and when a gender focus is applied, it becomes even more apparent that women and indigenous women are the most disadvantaged group in the world when it comes to education for the adult population.

2. The UNESCO Institute for Education, as UNESCO's policy unit for adult education, has been working at an international level to bring together practitioners, policy makers and indigenous peoples' representatives to discuss the key issues and define agendas for adult education in this respect. A key forum for this was UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in 1997 which resulted in two major documents: **The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning** and **The Agenda for the Future**. The Declaration affirms in articles 15 and 18 the rights of indigenous peoples in regard to adult education:

> Article 15
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> *Diversity and equality.* Adult learning should reflect the richness of cultural diversity and respect traditional and indigenous peoples' knowledge and systems of learning; the right to learn in the mother tongue should be reflected and implemented. Adult education faces an acute challenge in preserving and documenting the oral wisdom of minority groups, indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples. In turn, intercultural education should encourage learning between and about different cultures in support of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, justice, liberty, coexistence and diversity.
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> Article 18
>
> *Indigenous education and culture.* Indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples have the right of access to all levels and forms of education provided by the State. However, they are not to be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, or to use their own languages. Education for indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples should be linguistically and culturally appropriate to their needs and should facilitate access to further education and training.

Moreover, in the Agenda for the Future Governments committed themselves to

Article 13

Raising awareness about prejudice and discrimination in society:

(a) by ensuring the legitimate right of people to self-determination and to the free exercise of their way of life;

(b) by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels based on gender, race, language, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability or any other form of discrimination;

(c) by developing education programmes that enable men and women to understand gender relations and human sexuality in all their dimensions;

(d) by recognizing and affirming the rights to education of women, of indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples, and of minorities by ensuring equitable representation in decision-making processes and provision, and by supporting the publication of local and indigenous learning materials;

(e) by recognizing that all indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples have the right of access to all levels and forms of State education, and the right to enjoy their own cultures and to use their own languages. Their education should be linguistically and culturally appropriate to their needs and should facilitate access to further education and training by working together, and learning to respect and appreciate each other's differences in order to ensure a shared future for all members of society.

3. The Conference provided a forum for discussion on the issues of adult education for indigenous peoples. Prior to the event a preparatory meeting was held in Oaxaca, Mexico, which discussed the key issues facing indigenous peoples with regard to adult learning. This resulted in two outcomes: a set of proposals for consideration by indigenous peoples called the Oaxaca Declaration on Adult Learning, and the special publication by UNESCO of the papers of that meeting in book form in an English and a Spanish version: Reflecting Visions: New Perspectives on Adult Education and Indigenous Peoples (ed.) (Linda King (ed.), 1998) (in Spanish: Visiones y Reflexiones. Nuevas Perspectivas sobre la Educacion de Adultos y Poblaciones Indígenas).

4. During CONFINTEA itself a panel of speakers composed exclusively of indigenous representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Colombia, Peru, Mexico and Denmark discussed their proposals for adult education policies. Amendments to the Conference documents proposed by the numerous indigenous delegates enabled their perspective to be introduced. For the first time, moreover, indigenous peoples were represented on some of the national delegations.

5. Following CONFINTEA, the issue of adult education for indigenous peoples continues to be a major concern for UNESCO, and we have been supporting initiatives and encouraging indigenous participation in broader platforms where these are relevant. The International First Nations Indigenous Adult Education Conference organized by the Maori Adult Education Association of New Zealand and to take place in June 1998 will focus specifically on the follow-up to UNESCO's world conference, will discuss the Oaxaca Declaration and will propose a Declaration for Action for Indigenous Adult Education. Latin American subregional follow-up forums organized by UNESCO in partnership with member States and NGO networks taking place at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999 will also take the issue of indigenous adult education as one of the key themes for action in the context of CONFINTEA follow-up.